



Security and Independency: The Third Reich as the Myth of the XXth Century?

The title of this article includes two rather difficult words: myth and independency. Myth refers to the sphere of religion. The word religion either comes from Latin relegare or from religare, which means the connection, the hanging on to and belonging to a god.

The meaning of independency is a bit more difficult: the Brockhaus Encyclopædia lists four meanings of Unabhängigkeit, of which the first three meanings refer to maths and statistics. Only the fourth meaning is related to our theme: independency in the sense of sovereignty.

In our investigations now we concentrate on the Third Reich and its prehistory. Was National Socialism really the “myth of the XXth century”? Because this is the title of the basic intellectual book of National Socialism, written by the “philosopher” Alfred ROSENBERG (1893–1946).

Biedermeier and the Revolution of 1848–1849

Historically the era of NAPOLEON was answered in Central Europe with the Biedermeier, which is an expression for the time between the Wiener Congress (1814–1815) and the revolution of 1848–1849.¹

The term Biedermeier brings to mind “worthy,” or a little bit also “Philistine.” The most important politician of the Biedermeier was Clemens METTERNICH (1773–1859), who is known for trying to oppress all freedom movements, if necessary, even with military power.

In the Biedermeier there was peace, but it was not the peace of freedom of political rights. This peace was based on military and

¹ HARDTWIG Wolfgang (ed.), *Revolution in Deutschland und Europa 1848–1849*. Göttingen, 1998.; SIEMANN Wolfram, *Die deutsche Revolution 1848–1849*. Frankfurt am Main, 1985.

political power, which oppressed everybody who wanted to change the situation.

This found its parallel in the increasing industrialisation, leading in turn to the inverse movement of socialism, which meant nearly the same thing as communism in our days. In 1847 Karl MARX (1818–1883), together with Friedrich ENGELS (1820–1895), published the Communist Manifesto against the oppression of the so-called working class by the industrialists, known as capitalists.

A change of a political or social situation—in both directions, for the better or the worse—can only take place during a structural movement; and that is always connected with insecurity, ignorance about the future and danger.

Sometimes it is a slowly incoming movement, while at other times it is a sudden revolution, as was the case in France in 1789, or in most parts of Central Europe in 1848. The change of the Biedermeier system came in the year 1848 with the revolution in France.

There was revolution also in nearly all parts of Germany, and also in nearly all parts of the Habsburg Empire, which included the contemporary states of Austria, the Czech Republic, parts of southern Poland, as well as Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, Croatia and the northern parts of Italy.

During this revolution, human rights were written down as part of the constitution. In the parliament, the (Austro-)Silesian politician Hans KUDLICH (1823–1817) achieved the liberation of the peasantry; robot and tithe were abolished.²

Also the Lutheran churches in Austria gained more rights; the Habsburg Emperors were strict Roman Catholics, and Protestantism was forbidden for a long time. Finally the Tolerance Patent of Emperor Joseph II., issued in 1781, legalised Protestantism in Austria. But due to this patent, Protestants were not allowed to build normal churches with a tower or large windows, so they could not be recognised as churches at all.

During the revolution of 1848–1849 these regulations were changed, so that since 1849 Lutheran churches in Austria look the way that most people imagine a church: a building in a place of its own with coloured windows, a large entrance door, a tower with clocks in it.³

2 KUDLICH Hans, *Rückblicke und Erinnerungen*. Budapest–Wien–Leipzig, 1873.; PRINZ Friedrich, *Hans Kudlich (1823–1917): Versuch einer historisch-politischen Biographie*. München, 1962.

3 TRAUNER Karl-Reinhart, *Die Idee von Emanzipation und Autonomie in den Revolutionstagen 1848–1849 unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Evangelischen Kirchen in Österreich*. Schulfach Religion 1988/3–4. 151–198.

The evaluation of the revolution of 1848–1849 may be different, but nevertheless these results paved the way of the future. After about two years the revolution was put down. Wien was attacked and conquered by military forces.

One of the leading officers is well known: General Joseph Wenzel RADETSKY, who had been chief of general staff in the Battle of Leipzig (1813), where NAPOLEON's power was broken twenty-five years before.

In Hungary the revolution, which also many leading Protestant intellectuals sympathised with, was brutally crushed by General Julius HAYNAU, who, strangely enough, was a Protestant himself.

The catalogue of human rights as part of the constitution was abolished, and under the new Habsburg Emperor an era of neo-absolutism began. Today the name of the new Habsburg Emperor, Franz Joseph, is connected with the “good old times.”

But for many people the beginning of his government was not so good at all; rather it was a time of fear and terror. For example, the fighter for the freedom of the farmers, Hans KUDLICH, was forced to leave Austria and later died in the United States.

From Neo-absolutism to Conciliation?

For about ten years the era of neo-absolutism prevailed in the Habsburg Empire, only losing importance very slowly. In 1861 the Protestants reached their equality of rights by the Protestant Patent.

But it was the defeats and not a positive political will that were the motivations to change the political and social situation: in 1866 the Habsburg Empire lost its hegemony in Germany. Prussia—no longer Austria—was the leading German state after the battle of Hradec Králové in 1866.

In 1871 the German Empire was founded, and Austria was not part of it. The centre of Germany was transferred from Wien, where even now the old German crown is kept, to Berlin—from the Habsburgs to the Hohenzollern.

This disaster in foreign policy also had consequences for the internal political situation in Austria. The Habsburg Empire was rebuilt as the still well-known Austro-Hungarian (Dual) Monarchy.

It was indeed a young construction, lasting from 1867 up to 1918. An important part of the constitution of 1867 was the catalogue

of human rights, in nearly the same form, which it had in the year 1848–1849.

This rebuilding of the Austrian State in the Habsburg Empire in 1867 is very interesting for our topic, independence. In Austria, many different nationalities—like the Magyar, the Czech, the Croat, the Slovak or the German—lived together; making it a truly multinational state.

In Austrian history we do not speak of nations but of *nationalities*. For the Austro-Hungarian administration the Jews were not a nationality, but a religious group. The term *German* for the German-speaking people in Austria was used until the 1960s.

This term is still used for the times of the monarchy. This term, however, must not be understood as a political statement for the integration of the Austrian Germans into the political state of Germany, but rather points out a cultural self-understanding.

The political term for this rebuilding is called *Ausgleich*. “Ausgleich” means on the one hand *balance* in the sense of “adjustment, equalisation”; and on the other hand it means “conciliation.”

The term *conciliation* is connected with the Old Testament word *shalom*, peace. Peace is—in the Biblical understanding—not a status, but a relation of people; “shalom” is—as it is called by theology—a term of relationship.

How we feel is the result of how we behave towards one another.⁴ It is not only a truth of psychology or of anthropology, but it is also a political truth, that one can only exist in relationships.

And one’s satisfaction depends on whether one is content in these relationships or not. In the German language, this connection can be shown with the word itself: *shalom*, peace, can be translated as *Friede*, and satisfaction is “*Zufriedenheit*”; *zu-Frieden*: for peace.

It is not possible for anyone to exist completely alone. The intellectuals of antiquity knew that when they defined the person as a *zoon politicon*—as a being made for the public (ARISTOTLE, 384–322 BC). Likewise the philosophy of Martin BUBER (1878–1965) showed that an “I” can only exist with a “Thou.”⁵

You cannot define *shalom* with the categories of legality or policy; you can only create a situation which makes *shalom* possible within a certain state of legality and policy. This will be accepted as a justifiable state then.

4 GERLEMANN G., שָׁלוֹם *slm* – *genug haben*. JENNI E. – WESTERMANN Claus (eds.), *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament*. München–Zürich, 1984. II.. 919–935.

5 BUBER Martin, *Ich und Du*. Heidelberg, 1978.

Independence can only be thought in a dialectic connection with relationship. Independence can never be thought in an absolute way, it is always relative. Relative is the same word as in “relationship.”

That is true at least for this world we live in, because Christians believe that absolute peace is in the hands of God and will be part of God’s Reign. But we are not yet living in this Divine Reign.

The theologian Dietrich BONHOEFFER (1906–1945) expressed this idea when he said that humankind is living in the time “before the last” (pænultimate), and this can never have absolute validity.

Everything we do has the character of these “things before the last” and is a fragment and has boundaries, even our lives in this world. Only in God there is eternity, which is not a term for a long time, but rather for the opposite of time.⁶

Not even in eternity will we reach independence, because then we depend on God—hopefully. Independence is a myth of this world, connected with self-fulfilment. Is a person really able to reach self-fulfilment? The Christian religion clearly says “no.”

The Break of the *Völkerkerker* and the New Freedom

As everything is a fragment, also the *Ausgleich* was a political fragment. It brought a balance between the Austrian part of the monarchy and the Magyar one, but it ignored all the other nationalities, such as the Czechs, the Slovaks or the Croats.

You can see the fragmentary character of the *Ausgleich* in the name of the Austrian part of the Empire. It was officially called “the kingdoms and countries which are represented in parliament”—a very impractical name.

Because many nationalities did not feel represented in parliament in a satisfactory and convenient way, the monarchy got the abusive name *Völkerkerker* (Prison of Peoples) by the nationalists of the different, especially Slavic peoples.

Their political aim was to break up the Monarchy and reach independence from Habsburg-Wien (and also from Budapest). They wanted to found states of their own, which contained only people of one nationality similar to the development in Germany or Italy.

Russia should be the mentor of the newly constituted Slavic states. World War I started in 1914 because of the nationalistically motivated murder of Archduke Franz Ferdinand (1863–1914), the Austrian successor to the throne.

6 BONHOEFFER Dietrich, *Ethik*. München, 1992.

He was murdered in Sarajevo in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which had been conquered in 1888 and annexed as a part of Austria in 1908.⁷ For the topic of independence, one aspect of World War I seems to be the most important.

While the monarchy fought against foreign states, many people within the monarchy or in exile fought against the monarchy to tear it apart and to establish their politically independent states.

One name shall illustrate this process: the Czech Tomáš Garrigue MASARYK (1850–1937)—a Protestant by the way—had been a politician in the old empire and a member of the Viennese parliament.

He worked for a sovereign Czech or Czechoslovak state. Therefore he left Austria during World War I and fought more and more radically against the monarchy. The Czech Legion, which had also been founded by him, fought against Austria-Hungary with military power as well.

After World War I he was the first president of the Czechoslovak Republic. In Hungary the last Austro-Hungarian admiral, HORTHY Miklós, became regent. His duty as a regent was to rule the land until the king came back.

The king was Charles VI (as Austrian emperor he was Charles I), who was beatified in the early XXIst century. But when Charles tried to be reinstated as Magyar king, HORTHY prevented it and threw out the legal king with military power.

Was Tomáš MASARYK or HORTHY Miklós—and many others with a similar biography, for instance the Slovak general Dr. Milan Rastislav ŠTEFÁNIK (1880–1919), also a Protestant like MASARYK and HORTHY—a hero of independency, or were they traitors and destroyers of a politically fairly stable Central Europe?

Were they neither of these alternatives, or both?⁸ This question asks how to deal with heroes at all. It is interesting that there are a lot of attempts for a new approach to heroes, even of the German “heroes” of World War II, e.g. Erwin ROMMEL (1891–1944), by former enemies.

In this context, the approach to the commemoration of heroes is also of interest. It is always a question of the perspective. And this perspective is written down with our history, and the transmitted

7 BAUER Ernest, *Zwischen Halbmond und Doppeladler. 40 Jahre österreichische Verwaltung in Bosnien-Herzegowina*. Wien–München, 1971.

8 YOUNG Desmond, *Rommel*. London, 1950.; VOGT Arnold, *Den Lebenden zur Mahnung. Denkmäler und Gedenkstätten. Zur Traditionspflege und historischen Identität vom 19. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*. Hannover, 1993.; ZWACH Eva, *Deutsche und englische Militärmuseen im 20. Jahrhundert. Eine kulturgeschichtliche Analyse des gesellschaftlichen Umgangs mit Krieg*. Münster, 1997.; MADER Hubert Michael – MADER Susanne, *Die Helden vom Heldenberg*. Wien, 2005.

history has influence on our perspectives, which are always a part of our identity.⁹

These women and men, however, fought for independency; they fought *for* an ideal, but at the same time they also fought *against* something. The monarchy was without doubt not the best political system, but, as history has shown, it was not the worst, either. And later things got worse.

The Time Between the Two World Wars: the Failed Democracies

The end of World War I is also the end of the monarchies in Central Europe. Germany and nearly all states of the former Austro-Hungarian monarchy constituted themselves as republics and democracies, some even as constitutional democracies, like Hungary.

Austria should again be taken as an example for the development between the world wars. In 1918–1819 it was constituted as the Republic of German-Austria, part of the German Empire¹⁰—as the constitution declared—under the leadership of the social-democratic politician Karl RENNEN.

The union with Germany was forbidden by the Allies. The basic—national—idea of most states was the same as the idea of the Czechs and Slovaks and of the new Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in the Balkans, later known as Yugoslavia.

The idea was to create one state for each nationality, and this idea found its political expression in the well-known *Fourteen Articles*, written by Thomas Woodrow WILSON (1856–1924), the president of the United States, who was also a relative of Tomáš MASARYK. Austria should be the state for all German or German-speaking inhabitants of the old Austrian Empire: the Austrian part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

And that led to various problems, because German and German-speaking people also lived in Czechoslovakia and in Slovenia. South Tyrolia was taken away from Austria and given to Italy as well as parts of Styria, which came to Slovenia. On the other hand, the neighbouring parts of Hungary, where German or German-speak-

9 CHAMBERLAIN Houston Stewart, *Grundlagen des XIX. Jahrhunderts*. München, 1899.; FOERSTER Friedrich Wilhelm, *Weltpolitik und Weltwissen*. München, 1919.

10 BRAUNEDER Wilhelm, *Deutsch-Österreich 1918. Die Republik entsteht*. Wien-München, 2000.

ing people also lived, came to Austria and formed the ninth Austrian district, the so-called Burgenland.

The biggest problem for Austria was the three million German or German-speaking people in Czechoslovakia, called the Sudeten Germans. Naturally, it was not politically practical to unite these people with the rest of Austria.

So these Sudeten Germans stayed in the new Czechoslovak State, and Austria became the state it still is today. As Austria had to be constituted as a state of its own—and not as a part of Germany—the so-called “First Republic” was founded in 1919.

The transformation was very hard—not only the political, but also that in the minds of the people. No one had confidence in this state, which nobody had wanted.¹¹ For a few years it seemed it could be a success.

But then the challenges of the time, the high unemployment rate and economic disaster, especially after the crash of the stock market in the year 1929, led to a destabilisation of the young republic. It was no longer able to keep the situation under control.¹² As usual in such situations, politically extremist groups and parties were founded and fought against each other, while the large parties also had paramilitary troops.

In 1933 Adolf HITLER (1889–1945) became chancellor of the German Reich. The takeover of Adolf HITLER and the National Socialists in Germany brought further insecurity. A civil war and an attempt at a National Socialist revolution followed, in which the Austrian chancellor Engelbert DOLLFUSS (1892–1934) was murdered.

In 1934 this resulted in one party—the Christian Social party—having built up an authoritarian regime, the so-called *Ständestaat*, which was closely connected with the Roman Catholic church. One had to be Roman Catholic to get a leading position; other political points of view were not represented in policy, and other parties were forbidden.¹³

Of course, that radicalised the opposition. On the one hand, it radicalised the Socialists, and on the other hand, the National Socialists. Radical leaders or agitators of these movements were imprisoned. All this was not fit to stabilise the situation.

11 BARDOLFF Carl, *Soldat im alten Österreich. Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben*. Jena, 1938.

12 DRIMMEL Heinrich, *Die Österreich-Trilogie. Die ungewollte Republik 1918–1938*. Wien, 1987.

13 SCHUSCHNIGG Kurt, *Im Kampf gegen Hitler. Die Überwindung der Anschlußsidee*. Wien–München, 1988.

Many people saw the German Empire as a political alternative to the authoritarian *Ständestaat*. The Socialists, of course, dreamed of a Socialist revolution everywhere in Central Europe. At the same time, the National Socialists dreamed of the enlargement of Germany, of which Austria was—in their opinion—an important political part; after all, Adolf HITLER was born in Austria.

The Austrian Protestants had a bad position in the *Ständestaat*: They were oppressed in many ways, and therefore the majority of the Protestants—including many National Socialists—also wished Austria to become a part of Germany, the land of Luther and the Reformation. There it must be better than in Roman Catholic Austria, they thought.

Only a few aspects of Austrian history between the two world wars have been shown so far. It is a typically Austrian history, but there are also similar political developments in nearly all Central European and European states at this time, not only in the states of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire.

In Russia, the democratic revolution of 1917 led to the Stalinist system, and the liberation of the “working class” ended in their total oppression. In Italy, Benito MUSSOLINI (1883–1945) became “Il Duce,” which means “leader,” or in German “Führer.”

A National Socialist movement was established in Czechoslovakia, especially among the Sudeten Germans under Konrad HENLEIN (1898–1945), but also in Slovakia under the pro-National Socialist government of the Roman Catholic priest Jozef TISO (1887–1947).

In the 1930s GÖMBÖS Gyula (1886–1936) ruled in a pro-National Socialist way in Hungary, and from 1944 to 1945 SZÁLASI Ferenc (1897–1946), the leader of the Magyar Fascist movement, was the head of state, or governor.

National Socialism

From the modern point of view, it is hard to deal with such pro-National Socialist positions, because we know the real face of Hitler-Germany, and of his cruel, totalitarian and felonious regime. It is not possible to excuse the people at that time. But we also have to consider that in those days of the 1930s, many of the National Socialist sympathisers had positive reasons for their sympathy.

The slogans of Hitler-Germany also had positive aspects: war against unemployment, putting in order all the serious problems of

the time, the new political position of Germany after the Treaty of Versailles in 1918, which was felt as a “peace of shame.”

Many people wanted to get rid of the past, in which Germany had failed politically, and wanted to find an independent, uniquely German way into the future. It is terrifying that some politicians realised already during the peace conference that such a treaty was not fit to stabilise peace, but only to provoke a new war.

When the French general Ferdinand FOCH, for instance, saw the new political map of Europe, he pointed with his finger at the Free City of Gdansk and declared that from there the next war would start.

The European states supported—or at least did nothing—against this development. With the Treaty of München, Great Britain, France and Italy allowed Hitler-Germany to occupy the Sudeten Lands in the year 1938. These were the areas of Czechoslovakia where the Sudeten Germans lived. Not even one of the politically important states protested against the occupation of Austria by the German Reich in 1938.

Austria was not able to find solutions for its problems, and therefore many people doubted that Austria had a future. Germany, on the other hand, was considered to be a modern and future-oriented state; the concept of motorways is only one example.

The situation of the German Protestants is interesting in this connection: the Protestant church was split into two different organizations. One was that of the “German Christians,” which tried a symbiosis with the National Socialists.

The other was the Confessing church, which kept its distance from the Hitler regime and aimed at independence from the state.¹⁴ Thesis five of the *Barmen* Declaration of 1934, the basic text of the Confessing church, maintains:

“We reject the false doctrine that beyond its special commission the State should and could become the sole and total order of human life and so fulfil the vocation of the Church as well. We reject the false doctrine that beyond its special commission the Church should and could take on the nature, tasks and dignity which belong to the State and thus become itself an organ of the State.”

But on the other hand, Adolf HITLER also tried—even though he signed a concordat with the Vatican in 1934—to get rid of all eccle-

14 MEIER Kurt, *Der evangelische Kirchenkampf*. Göttingen, 1984.; STEGEMANN Wolfgang (ed.), *Kirche und Nationalsozialismus*. Stuttgart–Berlin–Köln, 1992.

siastical influence. Furthermore, he tried to oppress and damage the churches—the Protestants as well as the Roman Catholics—by stopping their public financial support.

In 1939 a law was passed stating that the churches should levy fees by themselves. In the German language there is a difference between fees which are levied by the state (*Steuer*), and fees which are levied by a non-governmental organisation (*Beitrag*).

Is it wrong to consider that both were also attempts to gain more independency? But it was without a doubt a terrible blindness that people did not realise, that this development involved the persecution of people. It involved those with other political points of view, but especially with people who were of a different “race”—in particular Jews, and Roma and Sinthi. Cruelty was an elementary part of this regime.

During the Crystal Night in 1938 everywhere in Germany synagogues were destroyed, graveyards were vandalized, Jewish shops were ruined, and about 30 000 Jews were immediately imprisoned. The Crystal Night was the first climax of the persecution of the Jews and the Shoa.¹⁵ Certainly everybody knew about the Crystal Night, it was broadcasted on the radio and shown in cinemas.

But obviously the Germans did not realise the intrinsic injustice of these acts—that a terrible injustice was being committed.¹⁶ It is too easy to declare all Germans as violent criminals or—at least—immoral people.

They had no perception of the real character and aims of their political leaders. And so the Third Reich was mainly responsible for the catastrophe that affected the whole of Europe, perhaps the whole world, in the XXth century.

Nearly all the states of the world were dragged into the disaster called World War II. The extermination of millions of people because of their “race” is an unimaginable crime against humankind. (The term *race* is written here with quotation marks because it is, from the biological point of view, not the correct use of the term; but it was used in the National Socialist propaganda-language in that way.)

It is also a perversion of the idea of humanity: about five and a half million Jews were killed in the different concentration camps

15 FRANK Anne, *Het Achterhuis*. Amsterdam, 2003.

16 MAJER Diemut, *Grundlagen des nationalsozialistischen Rechtssystems. Führerprinzip, Sonderrecht, Einheitspartei*. Stuttgart, 1987.

(KZ-lagers).¹⁷ Thus, Hitler-Germany was a totalitarian regime. That means that all areas of life in Germany were controlled by the only party. Only to think for oneself, independently from the National Socialist propaganda, was considered resistance.

National Socialism had many religious characteristics. The Third Reich thought in a totalitarian way. The “SS” was like a religious order, Adolf HITLER was not only the political leader, but he was regarded as having been brought by providence—of which he often spoke in public.¹⁸

The Third Reich as a Myth of the XXth Century?

The ideas of Alfred ROSENBERG (1893–1946) have been considered even by sympathisers of the German Christians as a basic attack on Christianity.¹⁹ The political idea of being independent and building up a state with people only of one “race” was turned into a pseudo-religious idea against the idea of humanity and independence.

Only a very few people pointed out the real character of the National Socialist policies. One of the first was General Ludwig BECK (1880–1944), the chief of the general staff, who tried to put Adolf HITLER off his plans to conquer the Sudeten Lands. When he realised that he was not successful, he immediately resigned. After 20 July 1944 he was killed.

There was also the resistance of clergy—the names of Dietrich BONHOEFFER and the Roman Catholic bishop of Münster (Westphalia), Clemens August GALEN (1878–1946), may be mentioned *pars pro toto*.

There were others, too: religious groups like the *White Rose* or the *Kreisau Circle*; and also Socialist or Communist groups, like the Red Chapel.²⁰ One group has not been mentioned yet, even though recently there were great commemorations. It is the group of Colonel Claus Schenk STAUFFENBERG (1907–1944), who made

17 PLOETZ, *Deutsche Geschichte: Epochen und Daten*. Darmstadt, 1998.

18 BOELCKE Willi A. (ed.), *Wollt Ihr den totalen Krieg? Die geheimen Goebbels-Konferenzen 1939–1943*. Herrsching, 1989.; HÖHNE Heinz, *Der Orden unter dem Totenkopf. Die Geschichte der SS*. Augsburg, 2000.

19 ROSENBERG Alfred, *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts*. München, 1930.; HITLER Adolf, *Mein Kampf*. Berlin, 1933.; HEYDT Fritz, *Die Kirche Luthers zwischen Rom und Mythos*. Berlin, 1935.; BURKARD Dominik, *Häresie und Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts. Rosenbergs nationalsozialistische Weltanschauung vor dem Tribunal der Römischen Inquisition*. Paderborn, 2005.

39 MOLTKE Freya, *Erinnerungen an Kreisau 1930–1945*. München, 1997.; FLICKE Wilhelm F., *Rote Kapelle: Spionage und Widerstand. Die Geschichte der größten Spionage- und Sabotageorganisation im II. Weltkrieg*. Augsburg, 1990.

the unsuccessful attempt on Adolf HITLER's life on 20 July 1944. Perhaps that was the last serious possibility to change the political situation in Germany and in Europe at large.²¹

For many years Great Britain had been unwilling to accept that there was a resistance in Germany, as Dietrich BONHOEFFER had tried to convince British politicians.²² The resistance of Dietrich BONHOEFFER, of the White Rose or the Red Chapel, tried to influence the population and motivate it to further civilian resistance.

On the other hand, the military resistance of the group of STAUFFENBERG tried to solve the problem at the top with the murder of Adolf HITLER. After such an attempt, a new German chancellor should have taken over political power and made peace.

It is very interesting how an officer of the German Wehrmacht came to the decision to work for the murder of his highest commander. There were two Austrian officers who participated on the 20 July assassination attempt.

One was Captain Carl SZOKOLL (1915–2004), who had to make the implementation of STAUFFENBERG's operational planning in Wien; the other was Lieutenant-Colonel Robert BERNARDIS (1908–1944), who was a staff-member of STAUFFENBERG in Berlin.

Robert BERNARDIS was condemned to death and killed in 1944.²³ At the beginning of the war he was employed as a staff officer in the East, and saw how civilians were killed there in a systematic way. He was soon convinced that this had nothing to do with warfare, but with a misanthropical policy. But he did not see any way to do anything against that, even when he got seriously ill at this time.

After convalescing, he joined STAUFFENBERG's office, where he got in contact with the military resistance. It has not been mentioned yet that he was a Protestant, so that the only Austrian, who was killed after 20 July was not only a highly ranking officer of the German Wehrmacht, but also a Protestant.

That is important, because—as it has been said—the majority of Austrian Protestants sympathised with the National Socialists. So did Robert BERNARDIS at the beginning, but he changed his mind after personal experiences. Perhaps it was part of the Protestant

21 SCHOLL Inge, *Die weiße Rose*. Frankfurt am Main–Hamburg, 1953.; DÖNHOF Marion, »Um der Ehre willen«. Erinnerungen an die Freunde vom 20. Juli. Berlin, 1996.

22 BETHGE Eberhard, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*. Minneapolis, 1999.

23 JEDLICKA Ludwig, *Der 20. Juli in Österreich*. Wien–München, 1965.; GLAUBAUER Karl, *Robert Bernardis: Österreichs Stauffenberg*. Wien, 1994.; SZOKOLL Karl, *Die Rettung Wiens: Mein Leben, mein Anteil an der Verschwörung gegen Hitler und an der Befreiung Österreichs*. Wien–München, 2001.

heritage in Robert BERNARDIS' life that his conscience led to the decision to join the resistance.

The word of conscience was brought to political discussion in a powerful manner for the first time at the second Reichstag of Speyer in 1529, when the German sovereigns fought for religious freedom. The term *conscience* comes from the Latin word *conscire*, which literally means “to be aware of something”; “scire” means “to know,” and “con-scire” means, that I “also know” something.

My conscience makes me a participant of what is happening, and I have to accept it—or to do something about it. To find one's own position beyond an all-or-nothing attitude is only possible on the basis of a firm conscience, which avoids any extremist approaches.

As theologians, we connect this with a verse of the New Testament: “Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal 5,1). This means that we have to recognize that the alternatives of this world are not absolute, and there is more than we can see. And that is the reason why Christians can feel freer here in this world.

There is at least one more way, the way in God, which Jesus Christ “has made us free” to choose. This gives us freedom and independence *from* the worldly possibilities—at least from a part of them. But this also gives us freedom and independence *for* the ardent search of alternative possibilities in this world. The way of living must be characterized by this freedom and independence.

But our everyday way of living also must depend on our conscience; because our conscience is the medium which brings the principles of God's Reign—the evangelism or gospel—into our world.

It seems that the world has not yet learned everything from World War II. Hate is still answered by hate. One thinks of the concentration camp of Buchenwald in Thuringia, which was still used by the Soviets as the so-called Special Camp 2 for a few years even after 1945²⁴—a chilling reminder that the Third Reich did not have a monopoly on evil, and that we still have a long way to go to ensure that the human rights of all people in all places are held inviolate.

24 RITSCHER Bodo (ed.), *Das sowjetische Speziallager Nr. 2 1945–1950. Katalog zur ständigen historischen Ausstellung (in Buchenwald)*. Göttingen, 1999.



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